

Amilcar Cabral on Internationalism:  
Policies, Practices, Promises and Problems

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Introduction

29 years ago an assassin's bullets felled one of Africa's greatest, modern, revolutionary theoreticians and practitioners. As time has passed he has come to rank with Lumumba, Mandela, Mondlane, Nasser, Nkrumah, Neto, Nyerere, Toure and others who have seen their nations' dilemmas with honesty, clarity, personal bravery and revolutionary resolve against fearsome odds against progressive change. Despite the hardships and challenges in their respective and interconnected struggles, they prevailed to the bitter end. We are meeting today to pause in our lives to reflect upon the valued and persistent historical impact of Amilcar Cabral. His mission to liberate Guinea-Bissau and the Cape Verde Island from five stifling centuries of Portuguese colonialism and fascism is still intact. It is celebrated today as an eternal gift to the citizens of those nations. Many of the practices that he developed in the struggle are also relevant today. Some of the promises and goals are still unresolved and there have also been twists, turns and setbacks in other areas. This paper intends to offer a rapid survey of some of the highlights of Cabral's work on the international plane.

Policies and Perspectives

Cabral saw the world as a very connected place. It was connected by potential forces of opposition and forces of potential friendship. Cabral typically viewed social, political, and economic relationships from a dialectical or interactive perspective. As a result he carefully appraised his opponent as well as his allies. He saw that circumstances and relationships always had the revolutionary possibility of turning into their opposite. This view was at the bedrock of his revolutionary optimism and in his personal capacity to formulate tactics and strategies that would bring the intended result, while anticipating and fomenting the inherent capacity for failures and errors of his opponents.

In his time and place he stressed that he had no quarrel with Portugal, Portuguese people, or Portuguese language, but he was the stalwart opponent of Portuguese colonialism and fascism as well as any alliances that sustained the practice and presence that was an equal burden to the millions of Portuguese workers, youth, peasants, draft resisters, and democrats who shared Cabral's perspectives. But the dictatorships of Salazar and Caetano were also resolute in masking their own colonial terror under the joint flags of "anti-communism" and "anti-terrorism" to conceal the true nature of their multiple wars against anti-colonial resistance in Africa. Just as the "anti-communist" scarecrow was used to divert and delay the contemporary civil rights and anti-war struggles in America, the same was trooped out in Africa and the Middle East to block the battles for national independence and against settler colonialism and racist apartheid.

Military vehicles, planes, arms, napalm, cannons, and such all streamed into Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique and Angola from the NATO nations that were than more preoccupied with the supposed anti-communism than with the legitimate aspirations for colonized people suffering from brutal repression and colonial exploitation. Today the

enlarged group of NATO nations is understandably focused on the new war against terrorism, but one fears for civil and human rights, "collateral damage," securing oil for the west, while again neglecting African poverty, genocide, slavery, diseases such as rampant AIDS and malaria, neo-colonial corruption, and military dictatorships. I do feel confident that Cabral would be strenuously opposed to terror and religious extremism of whatever form, but his eyes would not be blinded to other urgent realities of Africa. Quoting from African folklore, as he was inclined to do, he might say now, "Don't let the eyes of the crocodile prevent you from crossing the river."

Then, colonial Portugal included ties to racism, settler colonialism, right-wing fascist group, free-lance mercenaries, and world imperialism, but this "crocodile" was not to stop Cabral from "crossing the river." The precision of his analysis was right on target. Democracy is restored to Portugal and created in South Africa. Settler colonialism is over in Angola, Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe; Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde are independent nations having democratic governments. These are huge triumphs just in their own right and in the 1940's and 1950's such foreign domination was projected to last for eternity.

Amongst his allies, Cabral's master stroke was the creation of the African Party for the Independence of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde (the PAIGC). He overcame a number of more narrowly defined parties that focused exclusively on Cape Verdean or on Guinean independence. Not only did he link these two nations, Cabral linked himself with the African continent and its peoples. This highest sense of internationalism was a real hallmark of Cabral and his political action. From this base he cemented ties with the Organization of African Unity and its liberation support committee as well as progressive and socialist nations in addition to trade unions, and a wide variety of anti-racist, pro-labor, anti-colonial, and anti-imperialist movements, such as the Southern Africa Magazine that I was writing for when I traveled with the PAIGC militants in Guinea-Bissau in 1973. He considered that he and his movement were irregular or anonymous soldiers for the United Nations, where he spoke on at least two occasions and he had a United Nations special delegation of the Decolonization Committee visit the liberated areas, despite Portuguese opposition. Cabral was a steadfast adherent to the principles of the United Nations charter to add to international legitimacy for the struggle in Africa. He also managed to have an audience with the Pope in Rome. This move helped to undermine the legitimacy of colonial Portugal and its Catholic constituency.

He was also an architect and co-founder of the important CONCP or Conference of Nationalist Organizations in the Portuguese (African) colonies. This was a brilliant move of internationalism that sought to unify all of the movements fighting against Portugal's colonial enterprises in Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, São Tome, Principe, Cabinda, Angola, and Mozambique. In these cases, internationalism was not only his personal spirit, but also a tactic in his strategy to unite his friends and disperse and weaken his enemy. This sense of practical internationalism was sensitively manifest when Cabral discussed the now famous topic "National Liberation as an Act of Culture" at Syracuse University in February 1970. This lecture was to memorialize the fallen Mondlane, former Syracuse University sociology Professor, founder of FRELIMO that was a member organization of the CONCP until he was also assassinated by the Portuguese. As a small personal note it was Mondlane, my former neighbor in Dar es Salaam in 1964, while I was working at the Mozambique Institute, who initially inspired me to engage in the international anti-colonial work that later took me to Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde.

Cabral identified personally and politically with the raging contemporary struggles in Vietnam and Southeast Asia, Cuba, South America, and well as in Palestine. In forum after forum he expressed his international solidarity with the movements that were fighting for their independence, nationhood, and human rights. Since most of these battles are long resolved it may be of interest to see Cabral's commentary about the struggle for Palestinian independence that has been so deferred and at such a bloody

and dramatic cost in lives, property and political vision. Cabral's words on Palestine would equally fit into our daily news and present foreign policy debates about Israel and Palestine.

In his selected texts that appeared in Revolution in Guinea (1968:149-150), Cabral spoke very strongly and clearly about justice, national and human rights. He stated that,

"On this basis we believe that the creation of Israel, carried out by the imperialist states to maintain their domination of the Middle East, was artificial and aimed at the creation of problems in that very important region of the world. This is our position: The Jewish people have lived in different countries of the world. We lament profoundly what the Nazis did to the Jewish people, that Hitler and his lackeys destroyed almost six million during that last World War. But we do not accept that this gives them the right to occupy a part of the Arab nation. We believe that the people of Palestine have a right to their homeland. We therefore think that all the measures taken by the Arab peoples, by the Arab nation, to recover the Palestinian Arab homeland are justified."

He continued...

"In this conflict that is endangering world peace we are entirely in favor of, and unconditionally support, the Arab peoples. We do not wish for war; but we want the Arab peoples to obtain the freedom of the people of Palestine, to free the Arab nation of that element of imperialist disturbance and domination which Israel constitutes."

Elsewhere, in his collected works published as Unity and Struggle (1979:25) he stated that "we are with the refugees, the martyred refugees from Palestine, who were humiliated, driven from their country by the maneuvers of imperialism. We are at the side of the refugees from Palestine and we support with all our hearts' strength all that the children of Palestine are doing to free their country and we support with all our might the Arab countries and the African countries in general in helping the Palestinian people to recover their dignity, their independence, their right to live."

Cabral would always hear the voice of the powerless but would not be afraid to criticize tactical and political errors such as suicide bombers. During the eleven years of war Cabral never instructed his militants to attack Portuguese civilian targets and conduct campaigns of terror in the colonies or in Portugal. It is virtually prophetic that these various quotations still carry such painful relevance today. I believe that he would be exceedingly distressed that this conflict has gone from bad to worse. Yet he would not be surprised that the chief imperial power is apparently incapable of becoming an even handed broker in this conflict just as the United States continued to support Portuguese settler colonialism until it was finally driven out of Africa. Then and now, in this hour of need, Cabral would still be with the Palestinian struggle for national sovereignty and against settler colonialism, irrespective of some supposed religious or security justifications., Cabral would note the "crocodile" here too, but he would still "cross the river."

## Practices

Cabral knew what was at stake for Portuguese colonialism and world imperialism. They would fight with all available resources and use the weapons relentlessly and violently as they did in Guinea-Bissau. He was well aware of the risks, even to himself. He knew that when the militants of the PAIGC would be caught they could easily face inhuman torture and summary execution. Rather than be filled with an understandable spirit of anger and revenge and Cabral encourage desertions from the uninspired, drafted Portuguese soldiers and when they were captured he would turn them over to the International Red Cross.

Cabral also insisted that he had no grievances with any Portuguese people only with their colonial practices that he sought to terminate. Such were illustrations of his tolerance and internationalism in the service of his cause. His cause took him to many

international destinations that included the strategically significant neighboring African nations of Senegal and Guinea-Conakry that provided sanctuary for his offices and rear support for his soldiers as the war advanced and to Morocco and Algeria before the war began in 1963. The other nations visited in Africa are very numerous for political missions and solidarity conferences; at least they should include Angola, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Ghana, and Tunisia. At various time he traveled in Western Europe to Portugal (where he went to University of Lisbon), France, England, and Sweden. In Eastern Europe, during the Cold War he visited the Soviet Union. In the Western hemisphere he was in the United States at least on two occasions visiting Lincoln and Syracuse Universities, the United Nations, and the American Congress and he also visited Cuba.

Given the policies and perspectives of Cabral, his practices were those of non-alignment with military blocs and with all measures to protect the citizens of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde in their various diasporic host nations. At the same time he clearly favored a progressive, socialist, and third world outlook that would improve economic, cultural, social and infrastructural development in practice. These practices do certainly continue in modern Cape Verde and, in different ways, in Guinea-Bissau.

His penetrating class analysis always scrutinized African, neo-colonial collaborators with imperialism. While he always maintained his objectivity one may assume that he was particularly offended by those Africans whose nation of patrimony and humanity would be transcended by personal greed and ambition. Cabral's personal practice was built on modesty, trust, and an unassuming nature. One might note that his forgiving nature and wish to trust even those who had betrayed him was a factor that even led to his tragic death in the evening of 20 January 1973.

## Promises

Cabral promised a resolute anti-colonial struggle that would lead to the political independence of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde. In fact he achieved even more. He contributed directly to not only the last major decolonization of Africa. Even more, he also advanced the struggle for anti-fascist democracy in Portugal that broke out on 25 April 1974 after his death, but remains fully intact today while many Portuguese do not comprehend his critical role in bringing Portuguese fascism to an end. Cabral also promised the political unity of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde under the banner of the PAIGC. This was also achieved after his death but was not sustained because of problems of narrow nationalism, Crioulo dominance, and personal ambition that derailed this alliance in 1980 and removed his half-brother Luis Cabral from power in Guinea-Bissau. It is clear that even more than his relative's loss of power, Amilcar Cabral would have been offended about the conspiratorial, undemocratic, and non-consensual means by which it was achieved and the loss of political cohesion between these West African nations that had come at such a high price, especially when this coup of "Nino" was undertaken in the name of the PAIGC that Cabral founded. As Cabral said, "tell no lies, and claim no easy victories."

I do believe that he would be gratified that the depth of the democratic process in Cape Verde is so great that his former comrade Commandante, and now Cape Verde President, Pedro Pires could freely concede his being voted out of office, when returning to power through the ballot box at a later time. Certainly Amilcar Cabral is now smiling at this process and result that brings President Pires to America on his first visit after being freely elected to this high office that he gained by a slim margin in the Cape Verdean diasporic community. Congratulations again, President Pires on your recent victory and on the enduring victory of Amilcar Cabral.

Equally the promises and spirit of Cabral have be reborn and perpetuated by the liberation and election of Nelson Mandela to become the first African President of South Africa who had languished in Robbin Island while Cabral carried on the armed struggle

in Guinea. One may be confident that the victories in South Africa would have been deeply savored by Cabral and the effort to move away from the vicious racism of apartheid by the means of the *Truth and Reconciliation* testimonies would have been very attractive to Cabral given his outlook and character.

#### International Problems...and Solutions

In the course of the armed struggle it was natural the problems and setbacks would take place, comrades fell and battle plans did not unfold as expected. Such is the nature of war. Yet, there was still steady progress and by the time of the unilateral declaration of independence of Guinea-Bissau it had been about 80% liberated from Portuguese troops. On the path to this victory, he had to remind his comrades that this was a "People's War" of the model of Vietnam, Cuba or China and that he and the party had to struggle against any tendency of "Warlords" he further clarified this point that the party members were "armed militants" and were not armed "militarists." Cabral identified closely with the historic and contemporary struggles in Asia and in Latin America and from their positive and negative experiences he applied appropriate lessons to the war in Guinea-Bissau. He also understood that the Monroe Doctrine that the United States was applied globally and the presence of NATO equipment presented to Portugal, has descended from that imperial doctrine. Indeed, the global containment of communism of the Cold War has now been replaced by the open-ended global struggle against terrorism that also appears to be cut from similar cloth. Cabral addressed this threat to national independence by resolutely stressing unity of Third World nations and a policy of non-alignment along with allowing non foreign military bases.

#### Conclusions

Cabral's premature death is greatly lamented since he did not live long enough to see the independence of Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde. But even as his life was slipping away he was readying his people for the declaration of independence. Most of his leading colleagues are still with us and he could be here too if it were not for the murderous conspiracy that took him away from his mission, family and friends. Yet, the fruits of his struggles and his many accomplishments are still living along with the vibrant memory that can still fill a conference with passion and the quest to reclaim his immortal memory. Yet, you one can be confident that were he still here he would be distressed to find some important unfinished business and some important setbacks.

Certainly he would be pained to find the international voices of workers, peasants, the downtrodden, progressives, socialists, and secularists are struggling to be heard amidst the grave crises now facing by the world. He would be stressed to see the grave neglect of Africa and profound indifference to disease, poverty, and civil strife. Cabral would be anguished to see the endurance of imperial capitalism and the temporary setbacks for tolerance, democracy, socialism, human rights. One easily imagines his strong opposition to religious extremism, but equally he would be sensitive to grievances from the Arab and Islamic world that have fostered this type of resistance to western domination and militarization of the modern international conflicts. Viva Amilcar Cabral! Viva Presidente Pedro Pires! A Luta Continua! No Pintcha, e Muito Obrigado!

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